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SUBJECT: CAMBODIA: FUNCINPEC'S ONGOING STRUGGLES

Classified By: PolOff Brent Soderborg, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Senior FUNCINPEC official Serey Kosal told us March 23 about the reasons for Ranariddh's resignation from the National Assembly presidency, the struggle within the party to designate candidates for government positions, CPP's role in undermining the royalists, and actions that might allow FUNCINPEC to bolster its position. Former King Sihanouk is aware of the party's ills, has been in contact with Ranariddh in Paris, but is unlikely to play a high-profile role in working out the party's organizational problems. (Since the discussion, PM Hun Sen has dismissed three FUNCINPEC governors, before Ranariddh could act to discipline them himself.) Recent events confirm FUNCINPEC's continued disarray and the opposition's enthusiasm to see its former ally's demise. Nevertheless, we think it likely FUNCINPEC will limp on in a weakened state, if for no other reason because the CPP has an interest in maintaining an alternative to Sam Rainsy's opposition party. End Summary.

Why Ranariddh Resigned from the NA  
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¶2. (C) Serey Kosal, senior FUNCINPEC official and Senior Minister in the RGC, met with DCM, Pol/Econ Chief, and PolOff on March 23 to discuss the problems facing the royal party. Kosal started off by saying he was saddened by the problems he sees in all three political parties, including FUNCINPEC. He said there will be more developments affecting FUNCINPEC's internal affairs, FUNCINPEC's relations with the CPP, and FUNCINPEC's stability in the future.

¶3. (C) According to Kosal, Ranariddh had no choice but to resign as president of the National Assembly. Kosal then listed the well-known list of issues discussed in the media and with other FUNCINPEC sources: CPP's breach of the parties' agreement not to interfere in each other's affairs, Hun Sen's rejection of Ranariddh's proposals to reshuffle FUNCINPEC cabinet ministers, removal of poorly performing provincial-level officials, and rejection of the proposal to create a Ministry of Immigration. With the 50 percent plus one formula having passed the National Assembly, Kosal said that Ranariddh knew he could be removed from his post, so it was better for him to resign. Kosal reiterated Ranariddh's desire to work with FUNCINPEC supporters at the grassroots level.

¶4. (C) Prior to Ranariddh's resignation, Kosal mentioned there was also rumor that FUNCINPEC and the SRP planned to join forces with the Chea Sim/Sar Kheng faction of the CPP to oppose Hun Sen. In response, Hun Sen allowed Sam Rainsy to return and began interfering in FUNCINPEC's internal affairs through Nhek Bun Chhay and others within the party close to the CPP. DCM asked if it was true that Nhek Bun Chhay had assisted Hun Sen in resisting a 1994 attempt within the CPP

-- and with the connivance of Prince Norodom Chakrapong -- to remove him from the leadership, and Kosal confirmed that this was true.

#### Senior Royals Denied Positions

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15. (C) Kosal said Prince Norodom Sirivudh, who resigned as acting FUNCINPEC leader on March 21 and currently holds no government position, never had any real power as Co-Minister of Interior and Deputy Prime Minister. He allowed that Sirivudh appointed FUNCINPEC people to positions, but the CPP ensured they had no real work and often lacked office space. The CPP had tried to engineer Sirivudh's ouster earlier, but with the National Assembly's two-thirds requirement prevented the CPP from succeeding as FUNCINPEC MPs would not agree.

16. (C) Ranariddh's proposal to have Prince Norodom Chakrapong replace Sirivudh as FUNCINPEC Secretary General (SG) was not popular within the party. Ranariddh wanted Chakrapong in that position because the latter understood the CPP, had experience, and Ranariddh believed Chakrapong would remain loyal to FUNCINPEC, despite his checkered political history. Every other attempt to nominate Sirivudh or Chakrapong for a government position met with CPP resistance.

17. (C) Calling from France, Ranariddh proposed to Sirivudh that You Hockry become the new FUNCINPEC Secretary General. Kosal said that Sirivudh then played a dangerous game, because instead of calling You Hockry and telling him directly, Sirivudh passed the instructions to Nhek Bun Chhay. Nhek Bun Chhay immediately alerted Hun Sen, and then called You Hockry, demanding to know why You Hockry was challenging him for the position. Hun Sen also called You Hockry,

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according to Kosal, and said that You Hockry had to choose between the Second Vice President of the National Assembly and the party Secretary General positions, that the CPP would not support his bid for the former if he continued to press for the latter. You Hockry said he wanted the National Assembly post more, so Hun Sen told him to drop his bid for secretary general. Ranariddh then decided to appoint Nhek

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Bun Chhay as SG to please Hun Sen, said Kosal, who worried that FUNCINPEC was beginning to look more like the CPP.

18. (C) Kosal said that Nhek Bun Chhay only has the support of about half of the party; Chakrapong actually has more internal party support, he noted. Nhek Bun Chhay is accepted as SG because party officials want to see if he can smooth issues between FUNCINPEC and the CPP. As a check on CPP influence through Nhek Bun Chhay, Kosal said Ranariddh has tasked Kosal to develop a list of nominees for deputy secretary general and a nine-member permanent committee

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comprised of loyalists to Ranariddh. Kosal said he thinks he is the only one in FUNCINPEC that Ranariddh really trusts.

It's 1993 All Over Again

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19. (C) Ranariddh plans to reshuffle provincial officials that represent a political liability to the party. If Hun Sen refuses, FUNCINPEC will go public with the information to embarrass the CPP. FUNCINPEC is also prepared to walk out of the coalition government if Hun Sen continues to be obstructionist. Kosal said that CPP's majority in the National Assembly and newfound operating space harks back to 1993 before UNTAC's arrival: Hun Sen was the PM, Chea Sim was Senate President, Heng Samrin headed the National Assembly, Sar Kheng was Minister of Interior, Tea Banh was Minister of Defense, and other CPP officials hold the exact same position they had in 1993. FUNCINPEC is trying to be

patient and avoid walking out of the government and the National Assembly, but they are prepared to do so if conditions deteriorate. Kosal said that FUNCINPEC and the SRP need to work together to resolve the current situation; otherwise, both parties will die.

¶10. (C) Ranariddh will return to Cambodia on April 2, and Kosal has implored the Prince to stay in Cambodia and assume a stronger leadership role. Kosal wants Ranariddh to talk to Hun Sen directly, to cut out the people under Hun Sen. (Note: Kem Sokha told us the same day that Ranariddh had indeed spoken with the PM on the 23rd, but we have no independent confirmation. End Note.)

¶11. (C) Pol/Econ Chief asked Kosal what Sihanouk thinks of recent developments. Kosal replied that Sihanouk had told Chakrapong to give up the SG position for the sake of the image of the royal family. Kosal noted that Princess Bopha Devi and Prince Thomico are good examples of royals. He also said that Thomico may be groomed to become FUNCINPEC's next party leader. DCM followed up, asking if Sihanouk would actually intervene and try to help the party. Kosal responded that the King Father will not lower himself into the fray over the party's internal organizational problems. Sihanouk reportedly is in communication with Ranariddh in Paris, but Kosal does not know what has been said between the two.

Comment

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¶12. (C) Kosal's discussion does nothing to dispel notions that FUNCINPEC is imploding and that the CPP is exerting ever-increasing pressure on the royalist party. Public bickering and disagreements between party members only provide ammunition to those speculating that the royalist party is on the ropes. If FUNCINPEC is to remain relevant in Cambodian politics it must get its internal affairs in order and present a united front -- something that does not appear to be in the cards anytime soon. What is disturbing is that the SRP is on the sidelines, cheering on FUNCINPEC's problems, just as FUNCINPEC did nothing to assist the SRP when Hun Sen was attacking the opposition during 2005. Both parties believe they would be beneficiaries of the other's demise; unfortunately, neither party leader trusts the other enough to overcome past differences and work together to achieve the reforms needed within the Cambodian government. End Comment.  
Mussomeli